How to Become a Certified Public Accountant

Job Description

CPAs provide trusting financial advising to individuals, businesses, and organizations to reach their financial goal. Though all CPAs are accountants, not all accountants are CPAs. Moreover, CPAs provide services such as financial and operational audits, management counseling, and tax preparations.

Work Environment

Accountants usually work indoors in a well-lighted office building or in a home office. Work is conducted at a desk with a computer to prepare financial statements, tax papers, and audits. CPAs tend to enjoy a diversity of job duties, a challenging work environment, and the professionalism associated with being Certified and bonded (insured again a legal action from faulty work or fraud).

Career Outlook

Job employments for accountants and auditors are expected to grow by 22% from 2008-2018, which is much faster than the average occupations.

Whether the economy is good or bad, accountants and auditors are high in demands to prepare taxes, financial advices, and set up books. As the tax laws become more complicated, people will require more accountants to help them look through tax returns and so on. The International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) is a growing movement that uses a judgment-based system to determine the market's value on assets and liabilities. Thus, because of accountants and auditors specialized expertise, this movement should increase its demands.

Accountants should have an aptitude in mathematics and be able to analyze, compare, and interpret facts and figures instantaneously. They should also be able to communicate the results of their work to clients both verbally and in writing. In addition, accountants must be good working with people, business systems, computers, and accounting software or systems.

Income

According to a salary survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, candidates with a bachelor's degree in accounting receive an average of $48,993 a year in 2009; whereas a candidate with a master's degree in accounting were offered $49,786. Moreover, accountants and auditors usually receive the standard benefits, which include health and life insurance, a 401(k) plan, and a paid annual leave. Though a high-level senior accountant may receive additional benefits.

Education Requirements

- A Bachelor's degree in Accounting or Business Administration
- A Master's degree in Accounting or Business Administration with a concentration on Accounting (recommended)
- Uniform CPA Examination
- Experiences in Accounting (part-time work or internships)

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Licensing and Certification

To be a CPA, candidates have to pass a national exam and meet the other requirements of the state where they will practice. After which, they will be licensed by their State Board of Accountancy. In addition, candidates are required to take the four-part Uniform CPA Examination prepared by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

Also, out of the 50 states in the United States, only California, Colorado, New Hampshire, and Vermont does not require 150 semester hours of college coursework. However, the other 46 states and the District of Columbia requires CPA candidates to complete 150 semester hours of college coursework and an additional 30 hours beyond the usual bachelor's degree to be certified.

Uniform CPA Examination

- Computer-based format
- Consists of 4 parts
    - Auditing and Attestation
    - Business Environment and Concepts
    - Financial Auditing and Reporting
    - Regulation
- Passing score is 75 on a 0-99 scale
- Question types include multiple choice, simulation, and written communication.
- Offered 2 months out of the quarter at various testing center throughout the United States.
- The CPA Examination is not to be taken lightly as it is rigorous. Very often, less than one half of those taken each year pass every part on one try. Although, it is required that candidates passes all 4 parts within 18 months of passing their first part.

Experience in Accounting

A candidate on the quest of becoming a CPA should have at least 1-2 years of general accounting experience under a CPA with an active license. Furthermore, a candidate can take up a summer or part-time internship at a business or accounting firm to gain experiences.

Warnings

- Be prepared to work long hours, especially during tax season.
- Be able to keep up with the changes in government laws and regulations.
- Your may get eyestrain from working long hours in from of the computer.
- You may also receive deadlines and competitive stress.

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Sources of Additional Information

To learn more about careers in certified public accounting and CPA standards and examination:
American Institute of Certified Public Accountants
1211 Avenue of the Americas,
New York, NY, 10036
www.aicpa.org

AICPA Examination Team
Parkway Corporate Center,
1230 Parkway Ave., Suite 311, Ewing, NJ 08628
www.cpa-exam.org

For information on CPA licensure requirements by state:
National Association of State Boards of Accountancy
150 Fourth Ave. N., Suite 700,
Nashville, TN 37219
www.nasba.org

For information on CPA licensure requirements by California:
California Board of Accountancy
2000 Evergreen Street, Suite 250,
Sacramento, California 95815
www.dca.ca.gov

California Society of Certified Public Accountants
1235 Radio Road
Redwood City, CA 94065
www.calcpa.org

Occupational Outlook Handbook
2010-2011
Available in the Career Center Library

Eureka: The California Career Information System
www.eureka.org
Site Code: For current Foothill students only, please contact the Career Center

Career Center Resource Library
Room 8329
(650) 949-7229